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ABSTRACT

Despite disagreement about the value of multicultural education, schools are putting some multicultural learning into the curricula already in place. This guide for parents describes the different ways that schools are teaching multiculturalism. Some schools emphasize programs that focus on information and teach about different cultural groups by adding to the standard curriculum. But the fullest programs alter the standard curriculum fundamentally and add multicultural information to all school subjects. Many multicultural education programs focus on raising the achievement levels of culturally or linguistically different students. These programs take many forms, but they are similar in aiming to help certain students learn as well and as much as students who are already high achievers. These programs can be viewed as compensatory. Still other programs focus on social issues and the cultural and political climate of the school. This type of multicultural education emphasizes human relations and uses parts of the other two types of multicultural education. Such programs may try to reduce racial tensions and to promote learning several languages ("multilingualism"). (SLD)

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for parents/about parents

A COMMUNITY GUIDE TO MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Importance of Multicultural Programs

In recent years schools have developed multicultural education programs for several important reasons:

- to make learning more interesting and relevant to students' lives,
- to let students share information about their heritage,
- to teach them about the cultures of their classmates and other people who came to the United States from other countries,
- to encourage their respect for all cultures, and
- to empower particular cultural groups.

Some educators, however, are opposed to multicultural education, because they believe that it may divide students along racial and cultural lines, rather than unite them as Americans; that it may promote tolerance of behavior that they condemn; and that it might promote the benefits of other cultures at the expense of pride in America.

Despite disagreement about the value of multicultural education, schools are putting some multicultural learning into the curricula they already use. This guide describes the different ways that schools are teaching multiculturalism.

Types of Multicultural Education Programs

There are three basic kinds of multicultural education programs, each with a different focus, and schools may offer one or all of them.

Programs Focusing on Information

These programs, the most common type of multicultural education, teach about different cultural groups by adding a few short readings to the standard curriculum or by holding a few in-class celebrations of cultural heroes and holidays. More in-depth programs include many multicultural materials and ideas.

The fullest programs totally change the standard curriculum by adding multicultural information and many different viewpoints into all school subjects. Examples of these programs are black, ethnic, or women's studies. In some cases, a multicultural program changes the focus of the entire school. Independent Afrocentric schools are examples of such complete programs. Some schools also have single-gender classrooms where girls are taught away from the distractions of a mixed-gender setting.

Programs Focusing on How Students Learn

Many multicultural education programs focus on raising the school achievement of culturally or linguistically different students, often minority students. These programs, which sometimes also put multicultural information into the curriculum, can take many forms. Some teach about the students' backgrounds to increase their interest in learning. Some use teaching methods that have been shown to work well with students who have culturally-based learning styles. Some are bilingual or bicultural programs, such as language programs built on the language and culture of African American students. Or they can be special math and science programs for minority or female students.

Because the goal of these programs is to help certain students learn as well and as much as students who are already high achievers, these programs can be viewed as compensatory. In fact, they can often be nearly the same as other compensatory programs which may not be multicultural in their focus.

Programs Focusing on Social Issues

These social programs try to improve schooling and the cultural and political climate in school. For example, they may try to increase racial and cultural tolerance. They may also try to desegregate schools and change the way they are organized so that all students are treated fairly and equally. And they may try to increase all kinds of contact among the races. Programs may encourage hiring

minority teachers, teach students how to become more tolerant, and teach in a way that lets students work together to learn and solve problems ("cooperative learning").

This type of multicultural education emphasizes "human relations" in all its forms, and uses parts of the other two program types. To reduce racial tensions, curriculum can emphasize positive social contributions of ethnic and cultural groups, and use several different teaching methods. The programs also can promote learning several languages ("multilingualism"). They can emphasize pluralism and cultural equality in American society as a whole, not simply within the schools. They may ask students to use think critically about racism, sexism, and other aspects of American society that prevent all people from being treated equally; or to examine issues from a large number of viewpoints different from their own or from traditional American culture. Still others may use cooperative learning approaches and shared decision-making skills in order to prepare students to become socially-active citizens.

This guide, by Wendy Schwartz, is based on **Varieties of Multicultural Education**, *a digest published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Clearinghouse for a copy of the digest and a list of other Clearinghouse publications.*

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Other guides to help parents help their children learn can be found on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) on the Internet. You can reach the NPIN World Wide Web at http://ericps.ed.uiuc, or the NPIN Gopher at gopher://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu. Ask someone in your local library, your children's school, or your parent center how to see the information on this network.

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